



## ‘La nuit trouve enfin la clarté’: captivity and life writing in the poetry of Charles d’Orléans and Théophile de Viau

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### ABSTRACT

This article seeks to broaden literary and historical approaches to poetry written by Charles d’Orléans (circa 1433–1440) and Théophile de Viau (1623–1626) by focussing on their respective achievements as prison poets in dialogue with the outside world; it examines the precise impact of each writer’s verse epistles in terms of rhetorical strategies associated with the figure of the prisoner for targeted and pragmatic purposes; it defines and analyzes each writer’s affective means of rhetorical persuasion in evoking the consolations of memory and friendship to mitigate suffering and, most importantly, in addressing specific recipients and readers of his verse. In these ways both poets insist on an underlying truth to life in one of the most artificial, yet neglected, forms of life writing: verse epistles read as instrumental forms of political lobbying and self defence. The artistic quality of their work has ensured that both poets are still known and read. What has not so far been made apparent is how both poets secured their freedom by appealing as prisoners to specific readers of their verse epistles. Their choice of genre and the external evidence of the earliest witnesses to their texts make these prisoners’ poems invaluable case studies for life writing.

*Keywords:* captivity, French verse epistle, political lobbying, dialogue, target readers

Studies of French literature from Charles d'Orléans and François Villon to Victor Hugo and Jean Genet have not only led the way in demonstrating the centrality of prisoners' writing for more inclusive concepts of a literary canon but also in expanding readers' understanding of the role of poetry in specific public and personal contexts.<sup>1</sup> Yet perceptions of the captive writer's mental anguish have been used since antiquity to configure metonymically aspects of the human condition as an existential imprisonment and we must be wary of reading prisoners' self impression and life writing as chronicles of life experience solely on the basis of the provenance of composition. Clearly not all prison writing is either life writing or related to the situation of captivity. However, the two French poets' works addressed here provide early historic examples and valuable opportunities to examine how symbolic associations of existential imprisonment and literary traditions of life writing from late antiquity were assimilated with specific pragmatic functions for affective poetry as calculated strategies of resistance and political lobbying in well-documented situations.

In antiquity it became conventional to represent the soul as imprisoned by the mortal body during life, and by extension to represent the power of love as forms of captivity or slavery that could either degrade or ennoble human subjects endowed with free will. Such metaphorical multivalency had a playful poignancy and pragmatic political purpose in poetry written by Charles d'Orléans during 25 years of exile and confinement in England, 1415–1440. By the early 17th century Théophile de Viau had also inherited a large repertoire of associations linking captivity and life writing that he drew upon, revised and expanded in subtle, serious but also witty, ironic ways in the poetry he wrote from La Conciergerie as a prisoner, 1623–1626. We so often think of artistic creation in terms of active breaking of boundaries and confines because these metaphors have such a rich history of expressive and associative currency and power. Thoughts are free, yet prescribed forms and tropes can liberate creativity in multidisciplinary intellectual pursuits. The most enduring works are always being revised and made new, refreshing their potency and resonance in different fields of artistic endeavour and in response to some of the most affecting and important experiences in ordinary human lives. Nevertheless, the authority of a writer's experience of captivity (literal

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<sup>1</sup> See Ioan Davies, *Writers in Prison* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Les Écrivains en cage: essai* (Paris: Editions André Balland, 1970); Joanna Summers, *Late-Medieval Prison Writing and the Politics of Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Jean-Marc Varaut, *Poètes en prison. De Charles d'Orléans à Jean Genet* (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1989).

or figurative) is granted by readers who are persuaded of the author's lived experience by virtue of their own experience of the author's lively and affective rhetoric. Both poets discussed here show themselves to have been cannily aware of the need to cultivate relationships between their subject selves or prisoner personae and the first recipients of their texts. Their self impressions in life writing take the forms of verse epistles as political lobbying and were instrumental in securing the real life personal redemption of their authors. In addition, the literary texts by other authors that were transmitted alongside these actual prisoners' works, in contemporary manuscript or printed sources, provide external evidence for events and personal relationships that had a demonstrable basis in real life as well as in shared literary traditions or paradigms.

The verse letter or epistle is a genre familiar from antiquity that was known by both poets. In the case of Ovid's *Heroides* for example it is associated with powerless figures suffering betrayal and distress in situations that purport to relate to their personal lives as characters of epic narrative and myth. Yet these romantic heroines of classical mythology are case studies and exempla for readers who always recognize these heroines' status as traditional figures of fiction that may be applied in ethical discussions of their situations with reference to other people's lives. For these reasons they were recommended by Erasmus (among others) as set texts for adolescent school boys. Moral letters of advice on ethical or philosophical topics in antiquity tended to use prose forms but medieval and early modern authors who saw poetry as a branch of rhetoric would not have considered verse composition as necessarily either reserved or excluded for specific topics of composition. Indeed, one of the most widely read and copied texts throughout medieval Europe, the prosimetrical *Consolation of Philosophy* (*De Consolatione philosophiae*, ca 524–525) by Boethius, combined prose dialogue, between a philosopher in prison and his nurse or tutor (the embodiment of philosophy), with lyrics sung by Lady Philosophy that were interspersed throughout the text to teach and delight the prisoner. The earliest known copy of the text marks the prisoner's speeches with the letter B indicating Boethius, a political prisoner who was condemned to death for treason by King Theodoric in 525. Boethius' text was known and read by Charles and his brother in their English captivity. It was valued by medieval readers as the condemned prisoner's testimony to his ideals, life, and situation which are discussed in the early sections of the work. In form and content the text imitates, revises and imaginatively reconstructs earlier classical literature, especially the dialogues by Plato that commemorate the teaching and bearing of the condemned prisoner and philosopher, Socrates. Viau had translated the *Phaedo* during a period of political exile in 1619–1620. As I have shown elsewhere brief dialogic

forms of argument, including correspondence, and short lyrics were frequently selected as opportune by writers in many different kinds of confinement, and from various cultural backgrounds, because they proved so often to be either necessary or convenient, and more compatible with such arduous conditions of deprivation and isolation.<sup>2</sup> I have chosen to discuss D'Orléans and Viau for the intrinsic interest of their poetry but also because their prison writing offers opportunities to test the hypothesis that literary artifice and shared traditions from antiquity focussed on Socrates and Boethius can (paradoxically) enable and promote unique examples of life writing that had externally documented consequences in actual lives.<sup>3</sup> In addressing named first readers each of these French poets secured the attention of powerful patrons, and renewed the commitment to his cause of sympathetic friends; both captives thereby used poetry to promote their immediate liberation, as well as to overturn in their own time and for perpetuity, through the immortality of their literary fame, the power structures that had controlled and confined them. I argue that while it may have been therapeutic or consoling to write to resist captivity (as many following Boethius have done) it was also pragmatic to deploy affective means of rhetorical persuasion in life writing dedicated towards an overall strategy of self impression for actual self preservation.

### I: 'DE BALADER J'AY BEAU LOISIR'

Charles d'Orléans was captured on the battlefield at Agincourt in 1415 and held hostage as a political prisoner of war in England until peace was made between England and France, and he paid a large ransom for his release.<sup>4</sup> As a member of the French royal family, he was well treated

<sup>2</sup> *The Consolations of Writing: Literary Strategies of Resistance from Boethius to Primo Levi* (forthcoming, Princeton University Press, 2014). See further on English early-modern prison writing Rivkah Zim, 'Writing Behind Bars: Literary Contexts and the Authority of Carceral Experience', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 72.2 (2009), pp. 291–311.

<sup>3</sup> The choice of relatively early historic cases helps to by pass problems of 'influence' within the vernacular literary tradition. E.g. François Villon accepted hospitality from the liberated Charles d'Orléans and wrote his own verses into Charles's book of poems that was repatriated with the prisoner; Verlaine's poetry could have been influenced by Théophile's precedent as a prison poet since his texts were frequently reprinted in the 19th century. André Chénier, like Villon, was a prison poet of intense moral vigour and tonal variation, yet his satire, in which he so often means the opposite of what he writes in anger, sadness or visceral bitterness, complicates his case and makes it difficult to argue for a direct relation between his life and art as self impression and life writing.

<sup>4</sup> See Pierre Champion, *Vie de Charles d'Orléans (1394–1465)* (Paris: H. Champion, 1911); for a convenient summary see John Fox, *The Lyric Poetry of Charles d'Orléans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 1–31, especially pp. 10–26, on the years in England.

and lived in conditions appropriate to his aristocratic social status; he had books, wine and other portable property sent over from homes in France, but he was denied his freedom, and, being placed in the custody of various keepers he was moved about to various English castles, for 25 years. He became proficient in English, produced at least two surviving volumes of lyric poetry, one in French, the second in English, and made friends among his several hosts and guardians some of whom shared his love of poetry.<sup>5</sup> Loss is a recurrent theme of his courtly poetry in both languages, which is heavily influenced by conventional literary games of love-talk and pseudo-autobiography made popular by *Le Roman de la Rose* in which the lover is a figurative prisoner of love. Orléans exploited opportunities in his compositions in both languages to play on contemporary readers' knowledge that his introspective poet-speaker was both a courtly lover of a lady (or two, or more, or none) and an actual prisoner, yet, as Mary-Jo Arn has concluded, the theme of the subject self's separation from his country, the loss of his 'lady', and mention of death, appears a stronger, more uniform theme in his English poetry.<sup>6</sup> This might have been designed to build up the empathy of his English keepers and readers. Although several of his keepers were bilingual, D'Orléans's more strident anti-English sentiments and his important political poems were not part of his performance of personality, or self impression, as the suffering French patriot and lover projected at English readers. He could have had no idea how long he would have to remain a hostage in England. In 1433, after 18 years, he told French peace envoys that he was physically well, but unhappy (*en desplaisance*) because he was wasting the best years of his life as a prisoner.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Mary-Jo Arn, 'Two Manuscripts, One Mind: Charles D'Orléans and the Production of Manuscripts in Two Languages (Paris, BN MS fr.25458 and London, BL MS Harley 682)' in *Charles d'Orléans in England (1415–1440)*, ed. Mary-Jo Arn (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 61–78; for Arn's critical edition of MS Harley 682, a fair copy of his English lyric sequence left behind in England in 1440, see *Fortunes Stabilnes. Charles of Orleans's English Book of Love*, *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies*, vol. 138 (Binghamton, NY, 1994). The French manuscript was taken back to France in 1440, and developed and extended in different ways by D'Orléans and his circle at Blois. For an edition of Charles's French manuscript poetry see *Ballades et Rondeaux*, ed. Jean-Claude Mühlethaler (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1992). Chaucer's granddaughter, Alice, a patron of John Lydgate, was the wife of one of his later hosts, William de la Pole, earl of Suffolk; see Derek Pearsall, 'The Literary Milieu of Charles of Orleans and the Duke of Suffolk, and the Authorship of the Fairfax Sequence', in Arn (2000), pp. 145–156.

<sup>6</sup> See above n. 5; I am not hereafter concerned with his English poetry.

<sup>7</sup> *Letters and Papers illustrative of the Wars of the English in France*, ed. J. Stevenson (London: HMSO, 1864), ii, p. 231, quoted and translated by Fox (1969), p. 17.

The prisoner occupied his mind by reading, writing and playing chess. An inventory of the books he took back to France in 1440 includes devotional texts and works on medicine and science.<sup>8</sup> His brother, Jean d'Angoulême (held hostage separately in England 1412–1445, with whom he seems nevertheless to have spent some time during 1429–1432 when they copied a book of prayers together), also copied part of a commentary on Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* while in England, and commissioned a copy of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Charles owned two copies of Boethius' text while in England which both brothers were aware addressed the dilemmas facing an intellectual imprisoned by political enemies. His poetic persona, 'Charlis Duk of Orlyauunce'<sup>9</sup>, anxious political hostage and captivated courtly love poet, played self-consciously on the ambiguities between these allegorical representations of self derived from Boethius' *Consolation* and from *Le Roman de la Rose*.<sup>10</sup> The conventional pose of the lover as figurative prisoner of the beloved, and of his own emotions, had extra piquancy when the empirical 'I', the creator of the poet-lover persona, could rely on his readers' knowledge of his actual situation.<sup>11</sup> In Ballade LXXX the folly of a youthful lover is cured by the rightful ministrations of Reason (*Raison qui tout redresse/ A son plaisir, sans tort ou mesprison*) who puts him down to ripen (*meurir*) over time, in the dank straw of a prison: *par sa tresgrant sagesse,/ Mis pour meurir ou feurre de prison*.<sup>12</sup> There is no corresponding English version of this lyric which was not part of Charles's performance of personality for English readers. Its fourfold repetition of the refrain – *Mis pour meurir ou feurre de prison* –

<sup>8</sup> For the 1440 inventory of Charles's books returned from England see Pierre Champion, *La Librairie de Charles d'Orléans avec un album de fac-similés* (Paris, 1910, rptd Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1975), pp. xxv–xxix; and Gilbert Ouy, *La Librairie des frères captifs: les manuscrits de...* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Fortunes stabilnes* (1994), lines 2720, 3044, 4788.

<sup>10</sup> On echoes of Boethius' *Consolation* see Arn (1994), p. 49, and Douglas Kelly, *Medieval Imagination: Rhetoric and the Poetry of Courtly Love* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 123–137.

<sup>11</sup> See further A.C. Spearing, 'Prison, Writing, Absence: Representing the Subject in English Poems of Charles d'Orléans', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 53 (1992), pp. 83–99; Diane R. Marks, 'Poems from Prison: James I of Scotland and Charles of Orleans', *Fifteenth-century Studies*, 15 (1989), pp. 245–258; Robert Epstein, 'Prisoners of Reflection: the Fifteenth-century Poetry of Exile and Imprisonment', *Exemplaria: a Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 15 (2003), pp. 159–198; and Jane H.M. Taylor, *The Making of Poetry: late-medieval French Poetic Anthologies* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 83–145, especially pp. 88–115.

<sup>12</sup> See Pierre Champion, ed., *Charles d'Orléans: Poésies*, 2 vols (Paris: H. Champion, 1923, rptd 1982), pp. 130–131, Ballade LXXX, lines 5–6, 7–8; these and all subsequent quotations from this edition (continuously paginated); the numbering in Mühlethaler's edition (*Livre de Poche*) follows the order of the most authoritative manuscript, and differs slightly from the standard edition by Champion: for B103 (cf. LXXX) see pp. 330–332.

within 28 short lines seems to insist on its evocation of a specific situation. The poem reflects a humorous and poised self-regard that might be ironical or sardonic, yet the progression from childish flower to youthful fruit depicted within the poem also hints at a stage of life beyond maturity: this poet might rot in prison. The verbs *meurir* and *mourir* still look and sound ominously close to each other, even allowing for historic changes in French spelling and phonology. As the speaker lying in the straw tries to come to terms with the length of his *continuance* (lines 9–10), / *Sans estre mis a l'essor de Largesse* (without enjoying the free flight of a bird), he claims that he is content to accept his lot, but in the third stanza the speaker offers an intense prayer for peace which would allow him to wash off the fusty mould of sadness (*moisy de Tristesse*) under the sunny skies of France. The poem rhymes *c'est ma desirance* with *au souleil de France* (lines 17 and 19). Yet the homesick speaker also appears to console himself with the idea that being put down to mature in the prison straw – a situation that he is forced to endure in humility, while waiting for better times – might be a providential cure: *J'attens Bon Temps, endurent en humblesse./ Car j'ay espoir que Dieu ma guerison/ Ordonnera* (lines 22–23).<sup>13</sup> The final four lines summarize the poem's allegorical significance as the speaker identifies himself as this hardy fruit of winter (D'Orléans was born in November), which has been placed to ripen in the straw deliberately to soften his *trop verde duresse* (line 27). Such duress signifies long restraint as well as hardship and becoming (or not becoming) hardened enough to withstand adversity. Like Boethius' prisoner persona the French speaker needs reason's providential cure for his immature response to affliction. Adversity may be life-changing and sometimes character building, but even the poise of a learned, philosophical French prince may be undermined by dread in wry contemplation of the proximity of *meurir* and *mourir*. The next lyric in D'Orléans's personal copy of his poems, *Ballade LXXXI*, adopts the voices of a speaker's Care and Anxiety (or Boredom) – *Soing et Ennuy* – who address his Heart, remonstrating with it for foolishly imagining that they could live without each other since Fortune holds the Heart tightly (*en serre*), and for so long, in England. Care and Anxiety continue to address the Heart explaining that their bitter worldly wisdom will safeguard it against the shackles of melancholy thoughts while (mis) fortune keeps him in England.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Boethius: 'Good fortune deceives, but bad fortune enlightens'. On the value of misfortune in freeing the mind from the shackles of pride and ambition and the paradoxical freedom of actual prisoners who preserve their moral integrity, see *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book 2, proses 2, 7 and 8. *Consolatio* as a genre of moral medication offers readers examples of personal misfortune to drive out the effects of other troubles.

<sup>14</sup> *Ballade LXXXI*, ed. Champion, pp. 131–132, cf. B104, ed. Mühlethaler, pp. 332–334.

The traditional enemy of both the imprisoned poet and the captivated lover is Fortune from whose long tyranny the speaker begs relief in the refrain of Ballade XL: *Helas! Et n'est ce pas assez?* (enough).<sup>15</sup> The formal envoy indicates that he writes lyrics because he has leisure, and other outlets for his energies are denied him: *De balader j'ay beau loisir, / Autres deduis me sont cassez* (lines 31–32). Poetry, he implies, kills time and relieves the anxieties that breed in sensitive minds abandoned to idleness or otium. The further explanation for this situation prioritizes the speaker's status as a prisoner, but the second half of the line immediately qualifies this primary sense in reference to the allegorical gamesmanship that also makes him love's martyr: *Prisonnier suis, d'Amour martir. / Helas! Et n'est ce pas assez?* (lines 33–34).

Since Fortune was deemed to have kept him a prisoner in the absence of peace, the poet's self impression as an exiled patriot dreaming of his return home – *De voir France que mon cueur a[i]mer doit* – was frequently combined with pleas for peace.<sup>16</sup> Ballades LXXV and LXXVI were written to commemorate negotiations held in May 1433 when D'Orléans was taken to Dover and spent several weeks looking across the Straits to France, having offered part of his own wealth (to no avail) as an additional inducement to the English government. In the first *Complainte*, probably also datable from this period, the exiled poet idealized the land of his birth without encoding expressions of personal regret in the usual courtly love convention. The poet names and identifies himself as a poet in the verse colophon: *Et je, Charles, duc d'Orlians, rimer*, and further reveals that he wrote his verses while a prisoner, praying in a tone of some exasperation, that peace should come before he reached old age: *Car prisonnier les fis, je le confesse; / Priant a Dieu, qu'avant qu'aye vieillesse / Le temps de paix partout puist avenir*. This complaint poem rhymes *la desirance* with *royaume de France*,<sup>17</sup> enabling the exiled patriot to preserve and project to others

<sup>15</sup> Ballade XL, ed. Champion, pp. 60–61, cf. B40 in *Fortunes stabilnes*, pp. 187–188: 'O Fortune, dost thou my deth conspire?' line 1; there is no mention of death in the French poem until line 19. The English refrain repeats 'Alas'. Contrast Boethius' Lady Philosophy who rails at the muses of poetry because the self-pity they encourage, evident in the prisoner's opening lyric, undermines his integrity and represents a false start to his recovery of self: see *Consolation of Philosophy*, Book 1, prose 2.

<sup>16</sup> 'En regardant vers le pais de France', Ballade LXXV, ed. Champion, pp. 122–123; cf. B98, ed. Mühlethaler, pp. 318–320. There is no English equivalent in Harley 682. This and the next poem, 'Priés pour paix, douce Vierge Marie', are datable on internal evidence since they refer to events in May 1433 when D'Orléans was taken to Dover during peace talks.

<sup>17</sup> 'France, jadis on te souloit nommer' (Complaintes I), see lines 82, 85–87, 88 and 90, ed. Champion, pp. 258–261. On dating see Champion's note p. 574. Part of this poem was secretly printed in the Netherlands after the fall of France in 1940 for distribution in occupied France as Resistance propaganda ca 1944. Varaut, *Poètes en prison*, p. 31, and Deborah Hubbard Nelson, *Charles d'Orléans: an analytical bibliography* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1990), p. 37.

a highly artificial literary image of self; yet, all the while, the mental discipline of the poet-maker seems to have helped him to build and sustain the poise associated with this self impression that was acknowledged by others in real life.

## II: CHARLES D'ORLÉANS AND THE POETICS OF POLITICAL LOBBYING

The poet's representation of himself became an explicit part of his campaign for release when he used his facility in writing lyric to attract the attention, and flatter the reputation, of Philippe le Bon, duc de Bourgogne (Burgundy). D'Orléans's verse epistles ask for the duke's intervention on his behalf; Bourgogne replied maintaining the same form. These epistles sustained a reciprocated literary dialogue between the two men, which provides external evidence for the use of this form as instrumental life writing. The occasion for their first exchange of verses was the peace talks held at Calais (then under English occupation), which both men attended in June 1439. Relations between their two families had been marked by a history of violence and murder, but politics and the exigencies of time seem to have fostered a new relationship that promised mutually beneficial prospects for the future. D'Orléans took the rhetorical initiative in rewriting their bloody history of familial enmity by expressing his concern for his 'neighbour', companion, and fraternal kinsman.<sup>18</sup> Their hopes for peace (he began) were shared, which opened new possibilities to see and talk to each other; everyone was well inclined to peace because, as they both knew only too well, war is nothing but torment: *Guerre ne sert que de tourment* (line 21). The refrain, 'S'il en estoit a mon vouloir', expresses the speaker's wish to contribute all in his power to secure peace, at the same time as it acknowledges his relative powerlessness in exile. The envoy is addressed to the poem, speeding the text on its way to the duke's presence at Saint Omer, with a specific function as political lobbying.

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Va, ma balade, prestement  
 A saint Omer, monstrant comment  
 Tu vas pour moy ramentevoir [*recall*]

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<sup>18</sup> 'Puisque, je suis vostre voisin', Ballade LXXXVII, ed. Champion, pp. 138–139; cf. B110, ed. Mühlenthaler, pp. 344–346. The heading in D'Orléans's personal manuscript (BN MS Fr. 25458), 'Orlians a Bourgogne', is in the poet's hand; for the history of the relationship with Bourgogne, see Fox (1969), pp. 6–8, 16–17, 26, 29. Philippe's father had murdered D'Orléans's father in 1407. Charles and Philippe le Bon were also brothers-in-law.

Au duc a qui suis loyaument,  
 Et tout a son commandement,  
 S'il en estoit a mon vouloir. (*Ballade LXXXVII*, lines 25–30).<sup>19</sup>

Bourgogne's response takes this refrain as his opening line in their dialogue, echoing the prisoner's wishes, and promising to do whatever he could to remove his correspondent from danger; the opening line implies his own greater power as well as his shared desire for an alliance:

S'il en estoit a mon vouloir, ...  
 Je vous assure, pour tout voir,  
 Qu'en vo fait n'aurait nul dangier;  
 Mais par deça, sans attargier,  
 Vous verroye hors de prison,  
 Quitte de tout...<sup>20</sup>

Clearly, the time had come for peace and thus for a useful ally's release from exile and captivity.

D'Orléans not only thanked Bourgogne for this encouragement he also extended a more explicit personal commitment to the duke's cause; he pledged his heart, body and *puissance*, or will/power, assuring Bourgogne that he would be forever, truly indebted to him (*pour toujours, sans jamais faulser*): 'Et vostre party loyaument / Tendray, sans faire changement'.<sup>21</sup> D'Orléans's political courtship of his potential saviour continued with one further dialogic exchange of verse epistles. Again, Bourgogne echoed the prison poet's refrain at the start of his new reply in which he accepted the poet's written yet coded declaration of loyalty while also reminding him of his duties to his own noble house of France. Bourgogne's poem in reply offered sympathy (agreeing that the prisoner had suffered more than enough), and, most importantly, his hope that there would be no peace between France and England without his release:

Pensez a vostre delivrance,  
 Je vous en prie chierement;

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Ann Tukey Harrison, 'Orleans and Burgundy: the Literary Relationship, *Stanford French Review*, 4 (1980), pp. 475–484; on the variations between the English and French versions of these poems see A.E.B. Coldiron, *Canon, Period, and the Poetry of Charles of Orleans: Found in Translation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp. 135–142.

<sup>20</sup> Ballade LXXXVIIa 'Response de Bourgogne a Orliaans' (heading in the poet's hand), ed. Champion, pp. 139–140, lines 1, 3–7.

<sup>21</sup> Ballade LXXXVIII, lines 31–32 (heading in the poet's hand), ed. Champion, pp. 140–141.

Car, sans ce, je n'ay esperance  
Que nous ayons paix nullement.<sup>22</sup>

The political nature of this exchange was for French eyes only. The poet's renderings of these texts in the Harley manuscript (Ballades 111 and 113) efface all mention of the specific context. No names are mentioned and no gender is apparent for the poet's addressee to whom he pledges all his love: 'With hert, body, my litill good, and all' (refrain). Thus an English reader's assumption would be that the addressee is a beloved lady to whom the poet wishes 'Honure, ioy, helthe, and plesaunce', while beseeching her not to reject his 'desire', nor to doubt his devotion and lifelong loyalty. All the lover asks is that she keeps some 'litill, prati corner ... Within [her] hert' for him.<sup>23</sup> The similarly romantic English poem in reply (translated and adapted by D'Orléans) envisages an erotic encounter between the male poet, still languishing in his lovelorn 'adversite', and the lady love who will 'shape' his 'deliveraunce' when they are alone together, and her 'myddil small/ Be onys within myn armys brought'.<sup>24</sup> Sexual secrecy thereby substitutes for political conspiracy.<sup>25</sup> There is no mention of alliances, peace talks or state affairs in the English poems which D'Orléans based on these French ballades in his dialogue with Bourgogne. The survival of these two different versions of the poem also strengthens the case for the application of the French poem as political lobbying in real life.

In his next verse letter the prisoner announced the happy news from 'Albion': his return to France is decided upon and he will shortly be released to fulfil the peace treaty and to find sureties for his ransom money.<sup>26</sup> D'Orléans implies that this is owing to Bourgogne's efforts on his behalf, and he therefore reiterates his dedication to his patron now that his obligations can be acknowledged as a free man: the speaker declares his intention to serve and love the gentle Bourgogne as long as they both shall live. His case is concluded, as the refrain signifies, *En bons termes ma*

<sup>22</sup> Ballade LXXXVIIIa, lines 19–22, ed. Champion, p. 142.

<sup>23</sup> Ballade 111, *Fortunes Stabilnes* (1994), pp. 369–370.

<sup>24</sup> Ballade 113, *Fortunes Stabilnes* (1994), pp. 371–372. The intermediate English poem (B112) has no surviving French equivalent and confirms the romantic nature of the speaker's ambitions as he addresses his 'hert, syn ye wol gone yowre way/ (And leue me soole) vnto my lady dere', Ballade 112, lines 1–2; *Fortunes Stabilnes*, pp. 368–369.

<sup>25</sup> See the discussion by Coldiron, *Canon, Period and Poetry* (2000), pp. 135–142 (texts included).

<sup>26</sup> Ballade LXXXIX, 'Des nouvelles d'Albion', headed 'Orlians a Bourgogne' in the poet's hand, ed. Champion, pp. 143–144. BL, MS Royal F.ii, fol. 73 contains an elaborate miniature illustrating this poem showing the poet as a prisoner writing in the Tower of London; it was used as a frontispiece in Fox (1969) and Arn (2000).

*matiere*. The prisoner's coded political message in verse gave form to a significant, political commitment and statement of loyalty that had actually helped to secure his release. In Ballade XCIII the poet thanks Bourgogne, assuring him that he will be 'Tout sien seray, sans changement, [Mettroye] corps et ame en gage'. The double senses of this financial debt (or ransom money) and moral debt in this declaration are only accessible in the original French poem.

However, in his next epistle to Bourgogne the poet explains his need for continued secrecy in ways that would be difficult to interpret except in a political context. He warns his new ally about a contingent, but necessary double bluff: because he remains among a hostile nation the poet will be obliged to play the hypocrite a little longer, and to counterfeit hostility towards his correspondent, the duke:

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Pour ce que je suis a present  
 Avec la gent vostre ennemie,  
 Il faut que je face semblant,  
 Faignant que ne vous ayme mye.<sup>27</sup>

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The poet insists that this double dealing is merely tactical, and that his friend should continue to believe that he will be loyal and true to him all his life (lines 5–8). This explanation seems intended to reassure the duke, but it also emphasizes the dubious nature of the rhetorical gamesmanship, encoded in love talk, that has so far protected the political declaration of loyalty. Furthermore, the poet instructs Bourgogne that he in his turn should also feign his true opinion so that no one will suspect the true nature of their love: 'Faignez envers moy mal talant,/ A celle fin que nul n'espye/ Nostre amour' (lines 17–19). By drawing attention to the mask he has been forced to wear, and will have to wear for a little longer, the poet risks alienating his new ally unless he can inveigle him to join the double game by taking him into his confidence. Their planned arrangement for a go-between who can communicate without writing may seem necessary but it also extends the tactical parallel with an illicit love affair. There is no way out of this impasse unless the rhetorical stakes are raised higher. An oath is a serious and binding utterance so the poet maker invokes his divine maker to vouch for the integrity of his word and deed, however playfully his loyalty may be expressed. Similarly, in the envoy to these verses the poet raises the possibility of deceit and 'tromperie' only to protest against its reality as he prays that he may be struck down by God if Bourgogne should ever find out that he feigns loyalty 'par tromperie':

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<sup>27</sup> Ballade XCIV, lines 1–4; ed. Champion, pp. 148–150.

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Dieu me fiere d'espimidie, ...  
 Si jamais vous povez trouver  
 Que me faigne, par tromperie  
 Vostre loyaument, sans fauser (lines 41, 43–45).

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Charles d'Orléans returned to France, and paid off his ransom with help from Bourgogne. In later life Charles remained faithful to his poetic word and supported the duke's political causes. He also extended his own patronage two decades later to another French prison poet, François Villon, suggesting that he neither forgot his own years of confinement nor his appreciation of the consolations and political value of poetry in captivity.<sup>28</sup>

D'Orléans's exploitation of the suggestive symbolism of courtly love poetry had enabled him to occupy his mind, console himself with introspective, yet conventional expressions of frustration, and provided a cultural nexus that brought him into real social relationships among English lovers of poetry that would have enhanced the quality of his life as a hostage. Yet, as these dialogic exchanges with Bourgogne demonstrate the rhetorical self impression constructed in his writing, helped to secure his release through his political 'courtship' of a powerful and conveniently placed patron.

In the early 16th century Charles d'Orléans's reputation as a poet rested on his love lyrics printed in 1509; the political functions of his life writing in verse epistles were soon forgotten. Yet, later prisoners' poems were also instrumental in securing the freedom of their authors and it is clear that the autobiographical elements of prison writing that preserved an image of self (as Boethius' had done) were both literary and occasional events.

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... to perceive or consider lives as like works of art is to entertain the idea of lives, and the persons and selves living them, as both creative and created; self-transforming, and thus artificial, and generally subject to the same aesthetic principles as works of art, including works of literature.<sup>29</sup>

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Théophile de Viau (1590–1626) is unlikely to have had any direct contact with the life writing of D'Orléans, and yet Viau's lyric verse composed

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<sup>28</sup> For a comparison of the ballades composed in captivity with more than 300 rondeaux written after 1440 and the introspection of their poetic personae see Rouben C. Cholakian, 'Le monde vivant' [in English] in Arn (2000), pp. 109–121. Villon had access to D'Orléans's personal manuscript, BN MS fr.25458, at Blois and wrote verses of his own into the book; see Taylor, *The Making of Poetry* (2007), pp. 103–114; and above, n. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 507.

in a Paris prison cell served similar functions in the poet's confinement. 'If selfhood is only knowable through its representations, then there is a sense in which those representations produce the subject as an object of knowledge.'<sup>30</sup> He wrote verse epistles addressed to actual and potential supporters, and published them, in 1625, to publicize his plight. Viau used his art to save his life and thereby became a celebrity prisoner in print.

One of the first printed texts that would have suggested a link between Viau's life and writing in the minds of early modern readers was his free translation of Plato's *Phaedo* – a 'Treatise on the Immortality of the Soul, or the Death of Socrates'. This was written in verse and prose (in imitation of Boethius' mixed form in the *Consolation of Philosophy*) during the winter of 1619–1620 when he was banned from Paris and spent a year in political exile, probably on account of power struggles at court.<sup>31</sup> Viau had already gained a reputation as a libertine, or sceptical free-thinker, on account of his opportunistic religious conversion from Calvinism to catholicism, and his life-style which included homo-social and homo-erotic relationships with literary associates and actors. By contrast with the restricted, elite circles Charles d'Orléans inhabited within the households of his aristocratic keepers, the broader social milieu for Viau's poetry was centred on the open, informal atmosphere of Parisian tavern clubs (or *cabarets*) where friends met to eat, drink and to discuss (often irreverently) life, art and politics.<sup>32</sup> For various reasons, some probably not unconnected with the charges of degeneracy made against Socrates, Viau had attracted the antipathy of powerful Jesuits who regarded him as a dangerous influence on younger French noblemen and gentry. He was thought to have been the author of satirical verses printed in November 1622 in a volume which had contained a preliminary poem attributed to him. When his name became associated with the contents of the entire volume he was dragged into legal proceedings to defend himself from attacks by a Jesuit

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 502.

<sup>31</sup> See Guido Saba, *Théophile de Viau: un poète rebelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), pp. 131–139. See also Richard A. Mazzara, 'The *Phaedo* and Théophile de Viau's *Traicté de l'immortalité de l'âme*', *The French Review*, 40 (1966), pp. 329–340, and the same author's 'The Philosophical Evolution of Théophile de Viau', *The French Review*, 41 (1968), pp. 618–628.

<sup>32</sup> See Claire Lynn Gaudiani, *The Cabaret Poetry of Théophile de Viau: Texts and Traditions* (Tubingen: Gunter Narr, and Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1981) for a full review of the critical reception of all Viau's works see Guido Saba's invaluable *Fortunes et infortunes de Théophile de Viau: histoire de la critique suivie d'une bibliographie* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1997), especially pp. 226–235 for assessment of 20th-century approaches to 'Théophile et la "pensée libertine"'.

polemicist who branded Viau 'le chef de la bande athéiste' and 'le roi des libertins',<sup>33</sup>

Although Viau denied collaborating in the scandalous *Parnasse des poètes satyriques* this denial only provoked the conflagration that broke about him literally and figuratively in July 1623. A decree issued by the Cour de Parlement ordered his imprisonment for blasphemy or 'lèse-majesté divine'; he was sentenced, in absentia, to be burnt alive with his books. In spite of a written appeal made in Viau's defence by his patron, the duc de Montmorency, the poet was burnt in effigy alongside his books. After escaping from Paris, Viau had taken refuge at Chantilly, Montmorency's country estate, but towards the end of August 1623 when he attempted to escape abroad he was captured, and imprisoned in the Conciergerie in the cell formerly occupied by the murderer of Henri IV. Viau described this cell as a stinking hellhole with walls running with damp: 'chargé de fers/ On m'enfonce dans les Enfers/ D'une profonde et noire cave/ Où l'on n'a qu'un peu d'air puant/ Des vapeurs de la froide bave/ D'un vieux mur humide et gluant.'<sup>34</sup> Here he endured acute physical hardship and mental anguish. He was regarded as a man already 'dead' or beyond the law, and he complained that as a simple maker of rhymes (line 74) he was regarded as worse than a murderer (lines 109–110). He went on hunger strike at the end of February 1624 to protest at the conditions of his imprisonment, and after a visit by the public prosecutor his conditions improved slightly; he was allowed to read and write, although, as he announced to his readers, the sun's light only penetrated his cell for half an hour a day.<sup>35</sup> In a printed appeal to the king he also complained that many of his former friends had found it prudent to desert him and he was therefore forced to rely on

<sup>33</sup> See Théophile de Viau, *Oeuvres poétiques*, Classiques Garnier, ed. Guido Saba (Paris: Bordas, 1990), p. viii for Saba's discussion and quotation from *Doctrine curieuse des beaux esprits de ce temps* (1623) by the Jesuit, François Garasse, Viau's principal antagonist. See further *Les Antijésuites: discours, figures et lieux de l'antijésuitisme à l'époque moderne*, ed. Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Catherine-Laurence Maire (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2010), I owe this reference to the kindness of the *EJLW* editorial board's assessor; also Frédéric Lachèvre, *Le Libertinage devant le Parlement de Paris. Le procès du poète Théophile de Viau (11 juillet 1623 - 1<sup>er</sup> septembre 1625) Publication intégrale des pièces inédites des Archives nationales* [Paris: Champion, 1909], (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1968). In his 'Requête de Théophile au Roi' the poet included a version of the story of his arrest in energetic and often humorous tones that mock his clerical attackers, see *Oeuvres poétiques*, ed. Saba (1990), pp. 265–275. My quotations of Viau's poetry are from this edition.

<sup>34</sup> 'Requête ... au Roi', lines 95–100.

<sup>35</sup> Antoine Adam (*Théophile de Viau et la libre pensée française en 1620* (Paris: Droz, 1935, and Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1965), pp. 371 and 374 n.7), quotes Viau's, *L'Apologie au Roy* (in prose, printed 1626) in which he scorned the response of the prosecutor who did him the honour of coming to see him 'sur le bruit qu'il eut d'une abstinence extraordinaire dont je me macerois depuis quelques jours'.

himself: 'Du premier trait dont le malheur/ Sépara mon destin du leur,/ Mes amis changèrent de face:/ Ils furent tous muets et sourds,/ Et je ne vis en ma disgrâce/ Rien que moi-même à mon secours.'<sup>36</sup>

Viau remained in prison for nearly two years relying on his wits in a defence strategy that involved writing and publishing poetry. These works are addressed to many powerful people who might be persuaded to offer him support; he also expressed his penitence which was at least politic.<sup>37</sup> He was released and sentenced to banishment from France when opinion in the Cour de Parlement turned against the excesses of his Jesuit persecutors. However, he died at the duke's Parisian town house in September 1626, aged 36, from an infection presumed at the time to have been caused by an excess of melancholy induced by imprisonment.<sup>38</sup> His poetry lived after him in a remarkable run of 88 editions published by 1696, and his poetic reputation was revived by leading Romantic and 19th-century poets including Hugo, Nerval, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé who regarded him as 'modern' in seeking, like Montaigne, to be true to his own nature.<sup>39</sup> His verse epistles published from the Conciergerie had several self-preserving functions as life writing.

### III: THÉOPHILE DE VIAU AND THE POETICS OF POLITICAL LOBBYING

Viau's prison works were published together with texts by some of his friends, as *Recueil de toutes les pièces faites par Théophile, depuis sa prise jusques à présent* (1625). He had also managed to arrange the distribution of his prison poems in separate pamphlets that were sold at bookstalls on the Pont Neuf, within hailing distance of the Conciergerie. Through these publications, *en livrets*, he became a celebrity dissident whose writing attracted public attention to his circumstances. In prison he was given the works of St Augustine to read; Viau promptly used the venerable self-impression of this penitent convert in constructing a literary representation of his own penitence. He claimed that Augustine's *Of the City of God* had provided the

<sup>36</sup> 'Requête ... au Roi', lines 15–20. In the preface to his 1623 works Viau wrote that his company was only welcome (*bonne*) to people with the strength to live without artifice (*la hardiesse de vivre sans artifice*), see Saba (1999), p. 171.

<sup>37</sup> The Duke of Buckingham also tried to intervene with the king, on behalf of Viau, when he came to Paris to escort Henrietta Maria to England. Viau had dedicated an ode to Buckingham when he made a brief visit to London in 1621.

<sup>38</sup> See Saba, ed. (1990), p. xv quoting the *Mercure françois* of 1626.

<sup>39</sup> See Saba, ed. (1990), p. xxvi; and *Fortunes et infortunes* (1997), especially pp. 307–310 for early editions, and Saba's conclusions, *Poète rebelle* (1999), pp. 216–220.

antidote (*mon contrepoison*) to the miseries he suffered in prison and had inspired his verse petition to the saint asking for forgiveness.<sup>40</sup> Using a standard Christian paradox to bless the fortunate fall that had given him this opportunity to repent – ‘Bénissant mille fois l’orage/ Qui m’en donne le repentir’ – the prisoner renounced sin, addressing Augustine in familiar terms, as he posed with his hand in the pages of Augustine’s book:

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La main dans les feuillets du livre  
 Où tu m’as attaché les sens,  
 Qu’il faut pour m’empêcher de vivre  
 Faire mourir les innocents (lines 117–120).

---

In his verse petition to Louis XIII, Viau also explored a political theme that widened his concerns to include the viability of the rule of law in France, which the Jesuits (he warned), with their foreign, inquisition-like procedures were in danger of subverting. Since this would affect the king as well as the poet in prison, he urged Louis to look beyond the particular case:

---

Voyez avec combien de tort  
 Votre justice sent l’effort [*i.e. violence*]  
 Du tourment qui me désespère:  
 En France on n’a jamais souffert  
 Cette procédure étrangère  
 Qui vous offense et qui me perd. (*‘Requête... au Roi’*, lines 235–240.)

---

The poet links this challenge to royal sovereignty with his own loss of life in balanced half-lines that suggest the king is dangerously blind if he does not see the parallel between them; the king is urged to look over the precipice that has destroyed the poet and, as God’s deputy on earth, to save him:

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Sire, jetez un peu vos yeux  
 Sur le précepte où je tombe,  
 Saint image du Roi des cieux,  
 Rompez les maux où je succombe (lines 291–294).

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<sup>40</sup> ‘La pénitence de Théophile’, lines 22 and 69–70 (ed. Saba (1990), pp. 261–264), written during the mardi gras carnival prior to Lent 1624; the court sent an Augustinian friar to study with Viau. See further on Viau’s daring in rhyming ‘Augustin’ with ‘festin’, Eric Méchoulan, ‘L’âme, prison du corps? A propos d’un détail du Théophilus in carcere’, *Les Dossiers du Grihl* (online publication of 24 December 2011, consulted 9 July 2013. URL : <http://dossiersgrihl.revues.org/4983>). I owe this reference to the *EJLW* editorial board’s assessor.

However, if the king does not help him, winter will set him free by killing him: 'L'hiver me donnera secours:/ En me tuant il me délivre/ De mille trepas tous les jours' (lines 298–300). The mordant simplicity of the poet's language enhances the starkness of the situation and its consequences.<sup>41</sup> The final stanzas appeal to the king's vanity (as well as self interest) by reminding him of the traditional power of poets to transmit the glories of kings to future ages. This is a cannily overt bargaining ploy; the prisoner claims that he only asks for light in order to see the king again; and he only wants his liberty in order to fulfil his duty to praise the king:

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Qu'il plaise à votre Majesté  
 De se remettre en la mémoire  
 Que parfois mes vers ont été  
 Les messagers de votre gloire (lines 301–304).

---

Viau had written similar verses lobbying members of the parlement in the spring of 1624 when he first gained access to writing materials in prison; the forensic rhetoric of these poems emphasizes the pathos of the prisoner's situation. In a playful irony he argued that it was time heaven punished the misdeeds of a flatterer of the court, thereby (apparently) accusing himself, as well as the court, of hypocrisy:

---

Il est temps que le Ciel s'irrite  
 Et qu'il punisse le mépris  
 D'un flatteur de Cour hypocrite  
 Qui vous a volé tant d'écrits  
 Qui sont dus à votre mérite.  
 Courtisans qui m'avez tant dérobé de jours,  
 Est-ce vous dont j'espère aujourd'hui du secours?<sup>42</sup>

---

The slipperiness of tone and ambiguity of the referents give these verses a tension and excitement that is potentially risky, yet also lively and humorous. Clearly, the poet implied, he had wasted his previous efforts *mal récompensés* on this cowardly and unmanly tribe; and yet, do his new insights make these new flattering verses any less valuable to their recipients? He threatens that his vengeance in verse will prevent honorable people from envying any of them:

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<sup>41</sup> 'Cf. 'On meurt de l'air qu'on y respire./ Tous les objets y sont glacés' (lines 317–318).

<sup>42</sup> 'Requête de Théophile à Nosseigneurs de Parlement', ed. Saba (1990), pp. 276–279, lines 64–70.

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Race lâche et dénaturée  
 Autrefois si mal figurée  
 Par mes vers mal récompensés,  
 Si ma vengeance est assouvie,  
 Vous serez si bien effacés  
 Que vous ne ferez plus d'envie  
 Aux honnêtes gens offensés  
 Des louanges de votre vie,  
 Et que les vertueux douteront désormais  
 Quel vaut mieux d'un marquis ou d'un clerc du Palais. (lines 71–80)

---

The poet attempted to manipulate the political animosities of his persecutors; the stones of his prison were less 'impassibles' (impassive and impregnable, or unmoved, even callous), than their stupefied spirits ('courage hēbétés', lines 84–85). His only weapon is verse which can be amusingly double-edged even in serious self-defence.<sup>43</sup> He concluded by expressing the hope that should the parlement judge that his muse had been punished enough she might, without ignominy, continue to inspire verse worthy to bring their honour to the eyes of the world (lines 108–110). Other individuals were also addressed in petitions that flattered their recipients by appearing to separate them from inferior hypocrites. Nicolas de Verdun, president of the Parlement de Paris, a known antagonist of the Jesuits and thus considered likely to sympathize with Viau's predicament, was addressed as one whose superior merits should at least enable him to perceive the truth; this alone would inspire the poet's confidence. Verdun's garden extended to the base of the tower where Viau was imprisoned and packets of papers are thought to have been passed from the prison to the poet's supporters and printers by this means, among others.<sup>44</sup>

#### IV: 'ECOUTEZ LA VOIX D'UN POÈTE'

The dialogue implied by verse epistles that request a response in actions (as well as in words, as D'Orléans's had done), and that remind their recipients of social ties and human relationships, was an important tactic in the poet's larger strategy of self preservation. Yet it also created expectations of argument and philosophical discussion that lifted the forensic rhetoric of these occasional poems beyond their specific context.

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<sup>43</sup> 'Et qu'enfin mes juges ployables/ Ou par justice ou par amour/ M'ôtent de ces lieux efroyables. / Je vous ferai paraître au jour/ Dans des portraits si pitoyables,/ Que votre faible éclat se trouva si faux./ Que vos fils rougiront de vos sales défauts.' (lines 94–100).

<sup>44</sup> Adam, *Viau et la libre pensée* (1966), p. 395.

Alongside these poems that appealed for help and threatened a poet's vengeance if it should not be forthcoming, Viau also wrote verse to thank his few remaining friends and to encourage their efforts on his behalf.

The first forty lines of the 'Remerciement de Théophile à Corydon' are an extended invocation to the muses for inspiration as he proceeded to write to Corydon, the prisoner's friend and protector (probably signifying either Montmorency, or Roger du Plessis, marquis de Liancourt).<sup>45</sup> Corydon is first addressed in line 41 as the only living person who has the compassion and courage to stand by the persecuted poet who therefore fears the fury of winds that might conspire in Corydon's shipwreck too. The self-consciousness of the writer's artistry up to this point in the poem seems an end in itself, yet it soon becomes apparent that even this graceful invocation of muses is rhetorically functional since it articulates the writer's resistance to oppression and elicits his friend's sympathies. The opening evocations of poetic fantasy in a timeless world of myth and beauty make the contrast with the actuality of the poet's situation, and its attendant dangers to his associates, more poignant. The poet asks the muses, as sisters of the sun god, to hurry up: their brother only has half an hour to visit him each day in his *cachot si noir* (line 23), and poets need light as well as inspiration in order to write:

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Suivez ce petit trait de feu  
 Dont votre frère perce un peu  
 L'obscurité de ma demeure;  
 Déesses, il vous faut hâter,  
 Le Soleil n'a que demi-heure  
 Tous les jours à me visiter.<sup>46</sup>

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Viau's views on the functions of poetry emerge in his appeal to contemporary poets, which was one of his earliest prison poems, written in March 1624.<sup>47</sup> Ordinary poets' muses (he notes) inspire word painting and ideas that enable poets to commemorate glory. By contrast, he regrets that the source of his creativity is frozen solid, and, paradoxically, that the terrors of the tomb in which he is immured (or perhaps his fears of death) render him speechless:

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Vous à qui de fraîches vallées  
 Pour moi si durement gelée

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<sup>45</sup> Saba ed. (1990), pp. 284–287, and notes on addressee, p. 284.

<sup>46</sup> 'Remerciement ... à Corydon, lines 15–20). Cf 'Théophile à son ami Chiron', pp. 288–290, a poem of gentle banter, and bitter-sweet complaint expressing tender appreciation of friendship. Chiron, the mythological doctor and teacher seems to denote Viau's medical friend Charles de Lorme.

<sup>47</sup> 'Prière de Théophile aux Poètes de ce Temps', ed. Saba (1990), pp. 291–295.

Ouvrent leurs fontaines de vers

...

Ecoutez la voix d'un poète

Que les alarmes du tombeau

Rendent à chaque fois muette ('*Prière ... aux Poètes*', lines 1–3, 10–12).

He complains that the lies and malice of his enemies imprison his muse in chains; he therefore begs the muses of other men's verses to save his poems should 'la calomnie' (line 25) light the fire that would literally have consumed his body merely burnt in effigy in August 1623. He recognized that his own muse and poetic voice were struggling in prison: 'la Muse est prise/ Et le bruit de tant de verrous [*bolts/bars*]/ Me choque la voix, et la brise' (lines 34–36). Yet he pleaded with fellow poets not to judge his work too harshly because if they were in his position their muses would also be devastated: 'Ne mordez point sur son ouvrage, / Car ici votre inimité/ Démentirait votre courage' (lines 88–90). He insists that he needs their help to avenge himself against his enemies who are the enemies of all poets. Beginning with Malherbe (line 92), he addresses other poets by name, urging them to make common cause with him for the sake of their art. The energetic, copious, self-conscious and often humorously exaggerated qualities of Viau's verse should attract and engage the attention of these fellow poets.<sup>48</sup> Such poems were part of the concerted pamphlet war in which his remaining friends sought to bring the charges against him into the open, and to discredit the witnesses who might be brought to testify against his character, ideas and writing. Yet the pragmatic utility of this poem – an urgent rhetorical means to a necessary end – has drawn criticism from normally sympathetic scholars.<sup>49</sup> Viau's anxiety that his muse was being stifled in prison need not be interpreted too literally: the ethical and political role of the poet's life writing in a specific situation may subordinate aesthetics yet have no less value for its readers who credit the poet's insights with the authority of experience.

#### V: 'LA NUIT TROUVE ENFIN LA CLARTÉ'

The prisoner's energetic and sometimes ironic, political lobbying was intermingled with celebration of important ethical and cultural considerations in Viau's poetry of absence, friendship and gentle regret. While his effigy

<sup>48</sup> Cf. lines 37–48 where he enjoins common purpose against his enemies or they will take over the world and it will be necessary to find more hands against them than a hundred 'Briarées' (one of three mythical giants with 100 arms and 50 heads each).

<sup>49</sup> See Adam, *Viau et la libre pensée* (1966), p. 376: '“Prière de Théophile aux Poètes de ce Temps” font peu d'honneur à son talent.'

was being burnt in Paris and in the sanctuary provided at Chantilly by the duchess of Montmorency, Viau had begun to write a sequence of ten odes celebrating the estate as a reflexion of the superior taste, and humane values of its generous owners: *La Maison de Sylvie*.<sup>50</sup> This cultivated idyll soon came to symbolize an antidote to the horrors of his urban prison experience, as well as an aspiration to escape its degradations through his life of the mind. Boethius' Lady Philosophy had inspired many others (besides her pupil-patient the prisoner in the *Consolation*) with her insistence that: 'The only way one man can exercise power over another is over his body and what is inferior to it, his possessions. You cannot impose anything on a free mind, and you cannot move from its state of inner tranquillity a mind at peace with itself and firmly founded on reason' (Book 2, prose 6).<sup>51</sup> The last two stanzas of Ode 5 describe the poet's arrest and must have been written after August 1623. In the sixth Ode the speaker's innocence and reason cry out from prison reaching towards the altar of a tutelary god in a luminous arbour (stanza 2), thereby evoking consoling memories of Chantilly. The speaker is transported there in spirit and ravished by desire for the spirit of this idyllic place where spring always lasts at least half the year and his muse holds him spellbound. Odes 7–10 dwell at length on the pleasures of this alternative world of allegorical perfection, inhabited by melodious birds and praiseworthy patrons.

Yet in Ode 8 allusions to Ovidian myths of violence, attached to the figure of the nightingale (the melodious singer that traditionally represented the poet), bring the prisoner's actual situation back into focus. Belaboured by incessant misery - 'Aujourd'hui dans les durs soucis/ Du malheur qui me bat sans cesse', (lines 61–62) – the captive begins to plan a vitriolic revenge. He wonders whether he will have ink black enough to paint his persecutors' portraits for posterity (lines 75–80), but then decides that it is better to use one's talent to praise goodness than scorn evildoers, and so he turns to the evocation of finer, worthier subjects since these are more satisfying in the longer term.

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Puisque l'horreur de la prison  
 Nous laisse encore la raison,  
 Muses, laissons passer l'orage.

...

Et mon oeil qui suit mon désir  
 Voit Chantilly dans ces ténèbres.

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<sup>50</sup> 'La Maison de Sylvie par Théophile', [10 odes] ed. Saba (1990), pp. 298–338.

<sup>51</sup> *The Consolation of Philosophy*, tr. V.E. Watts (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 70.

Au travers de ma noire tour  
 Mon âme a des rayons qui percent  
 Dans ce parc que les yeux du jour  
 Si difficilement traversent,  
 Mes sens en ont tout le tableau,  
 Je sens les fleurs au bord de l’eau,  
 Je prends le frais qui les humecte,  
 La Princesse s’y vient asseoir,  
 Je vois comme elle y va le soir  
 Que le jour fuit et la respecte.<sup>52</sup>

The sensory pleasures of this landscape in which he imagines his patron’s wife enjoying the evening air are evoked *si difficilement* but they suggest ways for the poet to mitigate the impact of his dark confinement: imagination creates the mental escape route to this locus amoenus where he can roam at large and forget the deprivations of the prison. At the end of Ode 8 Viau’s nightingale forgets his pains of old and sings so wisely (*si sagement*) in the darkness that it seems judgment (or discretion) informs his songs: the fruits of adversity are paradoxical. In the last ode the poet’s senses are restored by this excursion of his visionary soul and he re-dedicates his verse to the praises of Sylvie (who personifies the duchess of Montmorency) and her beautiful home: each drop of water, leaf and colour change deserves a separate book of lyric verse:

Je sais qu’un seul rayon du jour  
 Mériterait toute ma peine,  
 Et que ces étangs d’alentour  
 Pourraient bien engloutir ma veine;  
 Une goutte d’eau, une fleur,  
 Chaque feuille et chaque couleur  
 Dont nature a marqué ces marbres,  
 Mérite tout un livre à part,  
 Aussi bien que chaque regard.  
 Dont Sylvie a touché ces arbres. (Ode 10, lines 11–20)

This elegant panegyric offered thanks for benefits received in the past and encouragement for future actions by his patrons in the expectation that he would not be forgotten. The value of the poem is also perceived as consolation for the poet whose words and memories of place and other

<sup>52</sup> *La Maison de Sylvie*, Ode 8, lines 85–87, 99–110.

poetry had helped him to resist the fear, anxiety and pain induced by imprisonment.

The last prison poem in the 1625 collection is a verse epistle of 330 lines (also in 10-line stanzas) addressed to Viau's brother Paul; it is datable on internal evidence to late summer 1624. This letter, like others by different prison writers including Charles d'Orléans, provides a substitute for familial contact or conversation, and represents the prisoner's need to communicate with others in order to strengthen his will. The writer resisted persecution by reinforcing his sense of personal integrity. Viau here addressed the brother who had shared his earliest memories and whom he could rely upon to appreciate their common heritage which is associated with their father's property. The prisoner represents his consolation in writing about their past life as a means to purge his rage against his Jesuit attackers. Yet, as in the panegyric praising the owners of Chantilly, Viau was also expressing his appreciation of his family in order to persuade his brother to work for his release. The verse epistle is therefore personal, specific and moving, but also artfully constructed to exploit the authority of the prisoner's experience and to demonstrate the paradoxes inherent in his situation: *'La nuit trouve enfin la clarté'*. The first and last stanzas (in which the poet contrasts his present miseries with anticipation of his future homecoming) mirror and largely repeat each other providing a frame for the entire letter; the form gives substance to the argument that change which is a constant principle in nature must come soon to relieve his suffering:

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Il faudra qu'on me laisse vivre  
Après m'avoir fait tant mourir.<sup>53</sup>

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As the poem articulates and expands on this paradox, it explains the captive's reasons for believing that his brother's 'firm, ardent and generous' (also gentlemanly) behaviour towards him in this 'long and hard adversity' (cf. lines 4–5) will eventually be successful. Thus, without underestimating the desperate nature of his situation the poem expresses not loss or nostalgia, such as characterize Charles d'Orléans's lyrics, but hope in the power of brotherly love, and faith in the consoling logic of a divinely ordered world in which nothing stays the same.

The second stanza quickly establishes the premise that there must soon be some resolution to the metaphorical storm that the prison poet endures: either the grave or a safe haven will open for him, but there must be liberation of one kind or another: 'Il faut enfin que la tempête /

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<sup>53</sup> 'Lettre de Théophile à son Frère', ed. Saba (1990), pp. 339–348; lines 9–10, 329–330.

M'ouvre le sépulchre ou le port.' (lines 19–20).<sup>54</sup> Our miseries, he continues, speaking for his family and for humankind generally, have certain courses or waves that are inscrutable to mortals. Yet, the secret flux of the tides is known by God, and the suffering poet acknowledges that nothing happens without the will of God, against which his enemies can do nothing. This philosophy had consoled the prisoner persona created by Boethius, and countless others. For the present, however, the poet regrets that neither side can know the outcome of their struggle and he confesses that he is devastated; his debates with reason (probably alluding to Boethius' scenario) do not help; he is so demoralized and depressed by fear that his senses are only 'pleased' by sadness which undermines resistance:

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Mon sens noirci d'un long effroi  
 Ne se plaît qu'en ce qui l'attriste,  
 Et le seul désespoir chez moi  
 Ne trouve rien qui lui résiste. (lines 51–54)

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At night the flames and snakes of his night terrors make him afraid to move in bed; and in the morning his conscious mind always returns to his obsession with the effects of his enemies' insatiable anger against him. The prisoner wonders whether they will ever weary of their persecution, and stop trying 'to decipher his rhymes', or even whether they retain any spark of humanity to resist the criminal barbarism of their plot: 'Et s'oppose à leur félonie/ Dans un si barbare dessein' (lines 75, 79–80). But then the prisoner asks why he should let them disturb his peace of mind since, as he proclaims his faith in God, he finds fellow feeling with the biblical Daniel and with the three captives miraculously saved from Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. The speaker rouses his spirits by affirming God's reach to be no shorter than it was in the time of our biblical forefathers: 'Car ses bras ne sont pas plus courts/ Qu'ils étaient au temps de nos pères' (lines 117–118).

This spiritual testimony would have been a convenient defence against earlier public charges of religious scepticism, but it also prepares readers for the philosophical turning point in the poem. The speaker reminds himself that one cannot rely on good fortune and even the greatest king cannot guard himself against misfortune (alluding to the assassination of Henri IV on the streets of Paris in 1610). No one is immune to disaster; as Seneca's drama had also demonstrated, thunder rolls unchecked into

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. above, 'Requête ... au Roi', lines 298–300.

palaces, and altars may be rocked or destabilised; ships and their sailors are never assured of safety at sea (cf. lines 141–150).

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Le sort qui va toujours de nuit,  
 Enivré d'orgueil et de joie,  
 Quoiqu'il soit sagement conduit  
 Garde malaisément sa voie (lines 151–154).

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The good times don't last and nothing stays the same. Only God knows what we are today and what we will be tomorrow (lines 158–160). Upon this realization, precisely at the mid point of the poem, the prisoner applies this lesson to himself and concludes that his luck must change too; it is inevitable, just as day follows night:

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Or selon l'ordinaire cours  
 Qu'il fait observer à nature,  
 L'astre qui préside à mes jours  
 S'en va changer mon aventure.  
 Mes yeux sont épuisés de pleurs,  
 Mes esprits, usés des malheurs,  
 Vivent d'un sang gelé de craintes.  
 La nuit trouve enfin la clarté,  
 Et l'excès de tant de contraintes  
 Me présage ma liberté (lines 161–170).

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This paradox consoles the writer who continues to affirm that he hasn't lost hope of revisiting his father's home at Boussères. From this point onwards the poem reflects a new spirit of stoical courage apparently created by the process of its composition.

The poet imagines the signs of heaven's favour when he will not only see his family estate but also taste its sensuous pleasures represented by a catalogue of soft summer fruits and the scent of winter jasmine. These poetic visions of beauty, plenty, and ripeness culminate in an evocation of the third brother, Maurice, 'the indefatigable Bellegarde', who farmed their estate making it function in perfect harmony with its inhabitants and surroundings. This literary dream of pleasure in the country home of his childhood surpasses all others; the prisoner desires nothing more than to spend the rest of his days there: 'Il faut qu'un jour ma liberté / Se lâche en cette volupté' (lines 265–266). He will have no regrets at the loss of his former life at court if having lived amid the sweetness of his own countryside, finally, his body may be covered with the same earth that covers his ancestors. Such a tomb is his birthright but the speaker's tone becomes agitated as he interrupts his daydream to register his distress

at the idea that he might not die at home after all (lines 275–280). One further stanza returns to the theme of the prisoner's contemporary situation and reiterates the argument that change is inevitable: hope will not betray him in this extremity which is too great to last much longer:

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L'espérance ne confound point;  
 Mes maux ont trop de véhémence,  
 Mes travaux sont ou dernier point,  
 Il faut que mon repos commence. (lines 281–284)

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Yet it is clear that not all his suffering is imposed from outside, or by others. The poet also regrets his earlier loss of personal integrity or steadfastness ('*ma constance*') in making a cowardly false repentance for something he did not do:

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Ils m'ont vu lâchement soumis  
 Contrefaire une repentance  
 De ce que je n'ai point commis. (lines 288–290)

---

This regret distresses the speaker so much that he turns aside from the consolations of memory, poetry and horticulture to vent his fury at all those false friends who had done nothing to help him, persuading themselves that it was sufficient to do nothing not to injure him: '*Le plus juste et le plus chrétien/ Croit que sa charité m'assiste/ Si sa haine ne me fait rien*' (lines 298–300). This familiar charge against the complacency of the majority recurs in moral and ethical prison writing: it is never sufficient to do nothing to avoid complicity with evildoers.

In the last tonal shift of the poem the prisoner's frustration is mingled with righteous indignation against his oppressors, this 'murderous crew' of unnamed Jesuits, whose persecutions kept him in prison: destitute, hungry, sleepless and powerless in the face of injustice and indifference. Why is there no end? The speaker's rage produces a series of powerful, ironic rhetorical questions: 'must I thus chew the walls here ... and tear the bowels out of myself just to satiate their hunger?' These words were considered too extreme by Viau's 17th-century editors, and this entire stanza in which the poet promises that he will take revenge on this hellish tribe for the injustice of his imprisonment ('*Malgré vous, race des enfers, /A la fin j'aurai la vengeance/ De l'injuste affront de mes fers*', lines 318–320) was cut from printed versions from 1632 onwards.<sup>55</sup> Yet this excision damages appreciation of the poem's literary tactics, because

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<sup>55</sup> See Saba ed. (1990), p. 348 n. and introduction p. lxxvii.

after the original cathartic outburst the emotional reversal of mood is especially striking. Finally, the speaker's peace of mind, detachment, poise, philosophical endurance and courage are perceived by readers to be restored. In the last stanza the poet commands his brother to fulfil the rescue his readers know he has already achieved for himself in the poem: 'Acheve de me secourir;/ Il faudra qu'on me laisse vivre/Après m'avoir fait tant mourir' (lines 328–330). The emotional energy behind the poet's depiction of his situation repeated in the first and last stanzas of the poem should convince readers of the authority of carceral experience it represents as a whole. Yet, the middle section in which his imagination anticipates his return home to a paradise garden estate mirrors the subjects of many country-house poems of the period, including aspects of *La Maison de Sylvie*. The variety of tones and affecting subject matter work their way into readers' minds and memories, to create an image of the suffering prisoner as writer, dreamer and brother that simultaneously engages our attention and our sympathies. If Viau himself arranged the order of his poems in the 1625 edition it would suggest that he knew readers of this last verse epistle in particular would not forget him. In leaving us with this final impression of himself he demonstrates faith in his art of life writing, and self impression.

## CONCLUSION

The devout medieval French aristocrat and the early modern libertine responded to their different conditions in captivity by writing lyric verses for similar strategic reasons, using comparable themes and tactics, including different forms of verse epistle. They sought and claimed to find in the order and stability of such formal writing, resources that enabled their survival. Each poet represented himself in affective images known from contemporary literature that combined intellectual arguments with specific political goals and aesthetic pleasures. In writing against their oppressors' ideas of their personal and political identities as prisoners in different circumstances each writer confirmed his values and recorded an impression of personal integrity that resisted those circumstances, for posterity. Yet it is important to note how D'Orléans's epistles simultaneously project different impressions of self – romantic or political – in his writing in English or in French for named individuals; he sought to evoke readers' empathy for his general condition and he deployed the verse epistle to flatter and manipulate a powerful potential patron engaging his art in the business of international politics. Bourgogne's poetic and practical responses in the original French provide external evidence for

reading D'Orléans's epistles as life writing and political lobbying. Viau also used his literary resources and rhetorical mastery to speak over the heads of his Jesuit enemies replacing their idea of the libertine poet with his own literary self impression. But like D'Orléans his first targets included those readers most likely to sympathize with him who might be persuaded to work for his safety and freedom. He celebrated a symbolic locus amoenus of pleasure, light, warmth and colour to escape the dark horrors of his incarceration by the power of imagination, which was also a tribute to his actual refuge at Chantilly. He exposed the repression, backbiting and hypocrisy of enemies to encourage the generosity and bravery of friends, and he clearly used his art to save his life. Each poet made his carceral experience an intrinsic part of his poetic message for different readers; the sympathies stimulated by affective images of persons and places create links between readers and writers. These links may encourage a sense of personal engagement, or even moral responsibility among readers that can encourage the development of humanity by extending readers' imaginative engagement with situations and persons beyond our ordinary personal experience. This is part of the politics of prison writing as an intellectual tradition in dialogic forms that has been a vital and instrumental mode of life writing since antiquity.

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